

August 2009 - Prayer Points

Those who do not have time to read the stories may get the prayer requests and main points in less than a minute by scanning the portions in bold italics.



The construction site as it looked three weeks ago – and how it appears today!



Mike Stolk hard at work

Dear Friends:

As mentioned last month, Mike and Hilda Stolk from Antipas Baptist Church in Pretoria are with us these days and hospital construction has been underway for three weeks already. The attached pictures show the marked changes that have been taking place at the work site during this short time. Each day I am increasingly grateful to this retired

couple for lifting us over the many obstacles that would have continued to delay this project indefinitely had we been forced to wait on me to oversee the construction. Also, had I been running the project, we could never have progressed at the remarkable rate which Mike's experienced direction has enabled.

1) Please peruse the accompanying photos of the hospital and thank God with us for what He is accomplishing through Mike and Hilda Stolk!

I imagine every Christian as he goes about his daily tasks looks for those occasional indications of the divine hand in his affairs to confirm that his work is of the Lord and not merely some scheme of his own. Recently we have seen two such manifestations which I rejoice to mention here.

Mike and Hilda originally arrived at the end of June expecting to start construction the first week in July. However, on the second day of their three day trip from Pretoria Hilda injured her back getting out of the car. When she arrived in Nampula she was in great pain. More significantly, she had nerve root compression with sensory deficit (numbness) which the most intensive non-surgical management available here

could not resolve. So an urgent flight back to South Africa for an emergency back operation was necessary, much to the chagrin of us all. It seemed that the unending string of setbacks that had already delayed this project for ten years was never going to end. Needless to say, we were disappointed as well for Hilda's sake that she had become a victim in the ongoing struggle we perceive between the powers of darkness that for centuries have reigned in this place and our intent to build a Christian-operated hospital with evangelism as its highest aim.



Erecting the rear wall of the building

Once back in Pretoria Hilda had the usual emergency evaluation for back pain. To everyone's dismay but no one's surprise, nerve root compression was confirmed. Worse than that, the surgeon declared Hilda's back a national disaster area from her years of hard labor for the Lord (she used to shovel concrete alongside Mike at the church camp they built where she often cooked meals for literally thousands of hungry campers at a single sitting). So an urgent back operation was scheduled for the first

available slot in the operating schedule. However, after days of agony, the morning of the scheduled operation Hilda awoke with no pain at all. She was able to get out of bed and even walk about normally! Rather than administer the preoperative medications, the nurses called the surgeon who after examining her determined he could not operate on an asymptomatic patient. So about the time Hilda was supposed to be having her back cut open in the operating room she was instead walking out of the hospital symptom free, to the great joy and amazement of all who had been praying for her!

It is necessary to add that a few days earlier a skillful radiologist guided by sophisticated imaging equipment had successfully injected steroids and probably local anesthetic directly into the vertebral column at the exact site of the nerve root compression. In the days following the treatment the profound paravertebral muscle spasm that was pulling Hilda's backbone out of proper alignment may finally have broken and that relieved the compression of the nerve root. I was not there to hear what the doctors thought was happening medically, but our relief at this last minute reprieve is not the least bit diminished regardless of how God brought it about.

So Mike and Hilda immediately boarded a plane back to Nampula. They did not even pass "go" or collect 200 dollars. Nor did they wait for instructions on how to take care of Hilda's back or get advice from a physical therapist or invest in a back brace. So they are with us again, and the evidence of their presence is every day more pronounced on the landscape at the front end of Grace Missions' property.



Meanwhile we pray earnestly each morning for God to sustain the remarkable deliverance He granted Hilda from her back problems, acutely aware of how vulnerable we are to some new reversal that but for the grace of God could crop up at any moment!

2) Please praise God with us for the last minute reprieve He granted Hilda from a major back operation, and pray that the excellent short term results she has enjoyed will prove lasting.



The evangelistic pavilion takes shape

A second phenomenon we can readily see as a reflection of God's hand in our affairs became evident last month as I processed Mike's financial report to the hospital board covering purchases of construction supplies during the past year. In that time the exchange rate between the South African rand and the American dollar passed through a cycle where the rand weakened from 7.5 rand/dollar to 10 rand/dollar, then strengthened back to 7.5 rand/dollar as at the beginning. After ten years of waiting to build, it was during this cycle that Grace Missions converted \$120,000 dollars into rand to cover Mike's purchases. Without our realizing it, and certainly without our controlling it, it so happened that the great majority of that transfer was accomplished at exactly the point when the dollar was at its strongest such that we gained a total of \$25,000 from the four bank transactions compared to what we would have received had we transferred the money at either end of the cycle. As all our construction purchases were for materials actually produced in South Africa rather than imported from abroad, this gain in the exchange rate produced a significant and real increase in the purchasing power of our money!



The future surgical block awaits the block layers



3) Please thank God with us for the unexpected \$25,000 "bonus" we received toward building expenses from exchange rates that fluctuated in our favor!

Just as Elisha smote the waters with his master's mantle calling out "Where is the God of Elijah?", we also are rapidly approaching a barrier immovable to us which we can only assault with believing prayer, calling out, "Where is the God of wonders?" Now that we are coming to the final financial outlays for this phase of construction, we are able to project fairly accurately our

total expenditures and it seems certain we will run out of money ten to twenty thousand dollars short of finishing the exterior of the hospital. We are amazed at what has been provided already, and we rejoice in the fact that during our 19 years on the field we have never run out of funds despite the large amounts that have often been spent. During all these years the Lord's provision has always matched the need without our soliciting funds from supporters who give so generously already. Friends who have received our prayer letters from the beginning realize we do not send out pleas for money, and I don't mean for this paragraph to be an indirect way of doing that. However, I do ask you to join in praying that the Lord may let us see His hand once more at work in granting this large answer to prayer and confirming again that we are not simply engaged in an endeavor of our own devising but rather are following His leading in Nampula.

4) Please pray fervently that God may grant the remaining funds needed to bring this phase of construction to completion.



The center corridor viewed from the east and west wings respectively



Before concluding this report, I will share one final detail related to the construction work. Because of the high unemployment rate here our call for 60 construction workers was answered by several hundred applicants. I interviewed them all hoping to capitalize on this opportunity to become better acquainted with some of our neighbors. I remember a famous preacher and theologian once mentioning in his introduction to a series of messages on the attributes of God that more than anything else, our view of God determines the way we behave and the kind of person we are. So the only question I asked the majority of our applicants was, "What can you tell me about God? What have you learned about Him in this life?"

How do you suppose that question would be answered if you interviewed 400 Americans? I was impressed that the vast majority here had the same pat answer – in fact at first I wondered if they had simply colluded with one another on their reply since it was so uniform. From my interviews, I learned that here the standard description of God is: "God is the Father of us all (not entirely in keeping with Christ's statement in John 8:42-44), is all-powerful, and does not depend on us for

anything, though we depend on Him continuously for everything, even to get out of bed in the morning and go about our work.” That is the Muslim as well as the local mantra about God. And it is not a bad beginning.

Unfortunately, beyond that pat answer hardly anyone had anything else to say. I was hoping to uncover Christians who would break out in a radiant smile at the opportunity to tell what God had taught them about Himself through Jesus Christ. I was delighted when that happened, but was surprised it occurred only three or four times in several hundred. Quite a few were quick to point out they were Christians and like most of the Muslims proceeded to speak of the religious duties and moral code they adhered to. But when I thanked them for that and asked, “But what can you tell me about *God*?” I was disappointed to find them speechless almost every time. I began to wonder how much time in religion is actually devoted to thinking about God or learning about Him. Is religion, even for most professing Christians, only a code of conduct or a list of things entirely devoted to what we are and do? Or is it a relationship with someone we can actually know, an infinite yet personal being who has made Himself abundantly knowable through Christ and the Scriptures?

So I was disappointed to net only a couple of good prospects for future hospital employees out of several hundred job applicants. And even with those sincere followers of Christ, when I asked how men could be made right with God, I was discouraged to hear in each case that one must obey His commands and then hope that in His mercy He will overlook what is lacking. That is no different from the Muslim gospel and no more effective in saving sinners. In Galatians 5:3-5 Paul urgently warns that any “Christian” who trusts in his works to commend him to God is fallen from grace, cut off from Christ, and without hope in the day of final judgment.

The fact that neither faith nor Christ was mentioned as the means of salvation by any of the church attendees interviewed, and that nothing was said about the atoning work of Christ on the cross, caused me to wonder how we will fill the positions when the time comes to hire the 60+ employee/evangelists needed to staff this mission hospital. But it does illustrate that despite the growing numbers of professing Christians here, there is a great need for Bible doctrine and scriptural evangelism both in and outside the church. Clearly we are not working in a pseudo mission field already saturated with the gospel.

5) Please pray that God may raise up from both inside and outside the country more workers for Mozambique, particularly for our future hospital, and ask Him if perhaps you might be one He has prepared to minister in this needy field.

In conclusion, next week we will begin assembling the prefabricated trusses for the roof and within two months we may be putting on the IBR roof sheeting. Mike is looking for an experienced roofer who could come to oversee this phase of the construction at least until he has learned the ropes. Are there any volunteers?



Starting the brick face on the south side of the hospital

6) Pray that God will supply an experienced man who can help orient Mike as he contemplates putting on the prefabricated roof we have ordered.

Until next month, thank you for your prayers.

By His grace,
Charles and Julie Woodrow